

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BASED HEALTH CENTER'S (CASBHC)

February 26, 2007

Testimony in support of increased funding for SBHCs

Good afternoon, my name is Debbie Poerio. I am a nurse practitioner and the Director of East Hartford's School Based Health Center Program (SBHC). I am here to speak on behalf of increasing the funding to the 68 SBHCs currently funded by the Department of Public Health.

State concern regarding the accessible and affordable health care services for the uninsured and underinsured is accentuated by the lack of safety net providers that currently exist. Legislative leaders are committed to increasing reimbursement rates for medical providers as incentives, however we cannot forget to also increase funding to those DPH grant funded programs that already exist such as SBHCS. One answer for increasing access, ensuring affordability, and prevention doesn't necessarily require the creation of a new system, it lies in subsidizing the SBHC system that not only currently exists, but has a proven record of successful health outcomes for children.

SBHCs are located within the school and open throughout the school day, addressing such barriers to care as parental time off from work, children's loss of academic time, and transportation issues. As these programs are located within the schools and have access to all students, there is never an issue with revenue lost due to children not showing up for appointments, which can prove costly. , but serves as a disincentive for private providers to accept uninsured and underinsured clients into their practice. SBHCs also prove cost effective as they incur minimal administrative overhead. Overhead expenses such as rent, heat, utilities normally incurred by a private practice are provided as an in-kind donation from the school system. But the strongest evidence supporting the cost effectiveness of services provided at the SBHC lies in the actual cost savings involved in their direct care. According to a study performed by CASBHC, a child seen for asthma through the SBHC averages \$22 for the visit compared to \$350 if that same child instead visits a hospital emergency room.

Everyone knows about the rising costs of health care and the difficulty accessing qualified medical, dental, and behavioral health care providers. Unfortunately, the state has only provided the SBHCs with two 2% cost of living allowances (COLA) in 18 years. Because of this, all SBHCs are significantly under funded, face challenges of retaining staff due to low wages, and are in danger of closing. In response to §51, of Senate Bill 317, the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health established an Ad Hoc Committee for assistance in improving health care through access to School-Based Health Centers (SBHC). In a newly released report it was discovered that although the average funding provided by DPH for each SBHC is \$105,000 per academic year, the actual cost to operate the program is \$296,300.

Therefore, I implore you to increase funding our SBHC Programs in order to allow us the ability to treat the very children that you are all so concerned about reaching. Thank you for allowing me the time to address the committee, and for your continued support of our programs.